

HHS' SAMHSA NATIONAL SURVEY REVEALS INCREASES IN SUBSTANCE USE FROM 2008-2009—MARIJUANA USE RISES; PRESCRIPTION DRUG ABUSE AND ECSTASY USE ALSO UP

The use of illicit drugs among Americans increased between 2008 and 2009 according to a national survey conducted by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). The National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) shows the overall rate of current illicit drug use in the United States rose from 8.0 percent of the population aged 12 and older in 2008 to 8.7 percent in 2009. This rise in overall drug use was driven in large part by increases in marijuana use.

The annual NSDUH survey, released by SAMHSA at the kickoff of the 21st annual National Alcohol and Drug Addiction Recovery Month (Sept. 16), also shows that the nonmedical use of prescription drugs rose from 2.5 percent of the population in 2008 to 2.8 percent in 2009. Additionally, the estimated number of past-month ecstasy users rose from 555,000 in 2008 to 760,000 in 2009, and the number of methamphetamine users rose from 314,000 to 502,000 during that period.

Flat or increasing trends of substance use were reported among youth (12 to 17-year-olds). Although the rate of overall illicit drug use among young people in 2009 remained below 2002 levels, youth use was higher in 2009 compared to 2008 (10.0 percent of youth in 2009, versus 9.3 percent in 2008, versus 11.6 percent in 2002). The rate of marijuana use in this age group followed a similar pattern, declining from 8.2 percent of young people in 2002, to 6.7 percent in 2006, remaining level until 2008, and then increasing to 7.3 percent in 2009. Additionally, the level of youth perceiving great risk of harm associated with smoking marijuana once or twice a week dropped from 54.7 percent in 2007 to 49.3 percent in 2009, marking the first time since 2002 that less than half of young people perceived great harm in frequent marijuana use. The rate of current tobacco use or underage drinking among this group remained stable between 2008 and 2009.

Overall past-month illicit drug use among young adults aged 18-25 increased from 19.6 percent of young adults in 2008, to 21.2 percent in 2009. This rise in use was also driven in large part by the use of marijuana.

"These results are a wake-up call to the nation," said SAMHSA Administrator Pamela S. Hyde, J.D. "Our strategies of the past appear to have stalled out with generation 'next.' Parents and caregivers, teachers, coaches, faith and community leaders, must find credible new ways to communicate with our youth about the dangers of substance abuse."

"Today's findings are disappointing, but not surprising, because eroding attitudes and perceptions of harm about drug use over the past two years have served as warning signs for exactly what we see today." said Director of National Drug Control

Policy, Gil Kerlikowske. "Fortunately, this Administration's National Drug Control Strategy, with its focus on prevention, treatment, smart law enforcement, and support for those in recovery, highlights the right tools to reduce drug use and its consequences. But our efforts must be reinforced and supported by the messages kids get from their parents. Past month marijuana use was much less prevalent among youths who perceived strong parental disapproval for trying marijuana or hashish once or twice than among those who did not -- 4.8 percent versus 31.3 percent, respectively."

Despite some troubling trends, the 2009 NSDUH shows continued progress in lowering levels of tobacco consumption among people aged 12 years and older. Current cigarette use among this population has reached a historic low level at 23.3 percent. However, even in this case, the pace of improvement is stagnating. The use of cocaine among those aged 12 or older has also declined 30 percent from 2006.

As in previous years, the 2009 NSDUH shows a vast disparity between the number of people needing specialized treatment for a substance abuse problem and the number who actually receive it. According to the survey, 23.5 million Americans aged 12 or older (9.3 percent of this population) need specialized treatment for a substance abuse problem, but only 2.6 million (or roughly 11.2 percent of them) receive it.

NSDUH is a scientifically conducted annual survey of approximately 67,500 people throughout the country, aged 12 and older. Because of its statistical power, it is the nation's premier source of statistical information on the scope and nature of many substance abuse behavioral health issues affecting the nation.

The complete survey findings are available on the SAMHSA Web site at: <http://oas.samhsa.gov/nsduhLatest.htm>.

National Alcohol and Drug Addiction Recovery Month (Recovery Month) recognizes the accomplishments of people in recovery, the contributions of treatment providers and advances in substance abuse treatment and recovery throughout the nation. Electronic versions of Recovery Month materials are available at <http://www.recoverymonth.gov>. The kit is downloadable at <http://www.recoverymonth.gov/Recovery-Month-Kit.aspx>.